

# 2005

## Montana Vocational Rehabilitation Council Annual Report to the Governor

### MVR Stats at a Glance

- In 2005, Montana Vocational Rehabilitation (MVR) provided services to 4,194 consumers who were engaged in an Individualized Plan of Employment.
- The total cost for the entire VR work program was \$14.9 million.
- 899 Montanans with disabilities went to work in 2005 with the assistance of Montana Vocational Rehabilitation.
- 75% of total cases served were severely disabled, while 82% of rehabilitated cases were severely disabled.
- Noteworthy Statistics:
  - Average MVR Consumer Wage Per Hour = \$9.51
  - Combined Annual Salaries of MVR Consumers for 2005 = \$13 million
  - Average hours worked per week = 30 hours

### Council Message

On behalf of the State Rehabilitation Council, I am honored to present the Annual Report to the Governor for 2005.

This past fiscal year, MVR served 7,984 Montanans with disabilities, and 899 of those consumers went to work as a result of services provided. The total annual earnings of those consumers who went to work reached \$13 million, with an average hourly wage of \$9.51. Each and every year MVR proves itself to be a cost effective program that adds to the economic viability of this state by helping persons with disabilities return to work.

The Council, in coordination with consumers and other stakeholders, presented a unified front in describing Montana Vocational Rehabilitation's (MVR) accomplishments and successes to the 2005 Legislature. Because of the combined effort, MVR's general fund dollars remained intact. In addition, the Legislature approved \$210,000 per year in new funding for the Extended Employment Program, which assists individuals with the most significant disabilities to find employment. This additional funding has reduced the waiting list for Extended Employment significantly. The Council would like to thank Governor Schweitzer for his support in fully matching the federal dollars available to MVR.

In addition to its "work" program, MVR serves Montanans with disabilities in its Independent Living Program (1,374 consumers), Older Blind Program (526 consumers), Extended Employment Program (225 consumers), Montana Telecommunications Access Program (755 consumers) and Visual Medical Program (89 consumers).

This report confirms the commitment of the Montana Vocational Rehabilitation Council members who, for the past twelve months, have worked diligently on behalf of individuals with disabilities. The annual report highlights our 2005 activities, accomplishments and recommendations. Our Council is committed to assisting Montana Vocational Rehabilitation in empowering individuals with disabilities to achieve competitive employment and independence in their communities.

## Success Stories

*MVR serves consumers with all types of disabilities. This year we have chosen to feature success stories of consumers who are most significantly disabled, and who have maintained successful community employment through the Extended Employment Program.*

John is a 37-year-old man who was diagnosed with schizophrenia in 1995. After his diagnosis, he spent the next few years homeless or bouncing in and out of various psychiatric facilities. In 2003, he left the State Hospital in Warm Springs, and moved into a group home. John applied for vocational rehabilitation services because he wanted to find a job and become more involved in the community. John worked closely with his VR counselor to explore his interests and aptitudes. He investigated different jobs, and eventually made the decision to work with animals. John had not worked for many years so he was encouraged to ease back into employment through volunteer activities and job readiness training. John was referred to the local mental health center for extended employment services. MVR also provided assistance with clothing and transportation. Through the combined efforts of MVR and the local mental health center, John successfully entered employment as a kennel attendant for the Humane Society. John was able to work in an environment that he thoroughly enjoyed, and for a supervisor who considered him to be a valuable part of their team.

Linda has been diagnosed with severe depression, anxiety, and bi-lateral osteoarthritis in her knees. She receives Social Security Disability benefits. Linda found that not working increased her depression and anxiety levels. Linda first applied for MVR services in 1995. At that time it was determined that Linda was not capable of competitive employment, and she began working in a sheltered employment environment. This environment offered Linda a safe place to stabilize her mental health and decrease her depression and anxiety issues. Linda re-applied for MVR services in the summer of 2005, after being encouraged by her supervisors at the sheltered workshop to seek employment in the community. Linda received supported employment services through MVR. Linda attended several meetings where employment options and opportunities were discussed. While Linda was anxious about working in the community, she was determined to give it a try. With a job coach, Linda interviewed, and was hired, as a lobby attendant at a local restaurant. She initially worked one-on-one with a job coach. The job coach also worked with Linda's employer to negotiate a workable schedule for Linda, which helped lower Linda's anxiety level. She continues to work with a job coach, but on a much less frequent basis. Linda is very happy with her job. Last month she received the Employee of the Month award for her hard work and dedication. Linda was able to stabilize and re-enter community employment, using less costly community supports. Her extended employment support dollars decreased from approximately \$18,000 to \$2,500 per year.

### Native American Vocational Rehabilitation

Each year, this report highlights one of the state's six Native American Vocational Rehabilitation projects. Providing vocational rehabilitation services to Native Americans, these projects are funded directly by the federal government to the Tribes. This year the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Vocational Rehabilitation Program (CS&K VRP) is featured. CS&K VRP has provided services for over 20 years to eligible tribal members who reside on the Flathead reservation

The CS&K VRP serves approximately 70 consumers per month. Currently the program has two staff members: April Zimmerer is the Project Director/VR Counselor, and Kim Lawson serves as the receptionist/transportation dispatcher.

CS&K VRP is housed in the Department of Human Resource Development: this is a one-stop agency, and is located at the Tribal Complex in Pablo. Consumers are ensured access to many comparable services in a single, central location.

MVR has shared cases with CS&K VRP in the past and will continue to do so when appropriate.

### MVR Council Mission Statement

The Montana Vocational Rehabilitation Council advises and works with the Vocational Rehabilitation Program to improve policies, programs, delivery of services to consumers, and methods for reaching potential consumers and employers.

### MVR Council Members

Shaunda Albert - Pablo, Haley Beaudry - Butte, David Boyd, Sr.- Poplar, Chris Clasby - Missoula, Denise Corrao - Miles City, Jim Daily - Butte, Ian Elliot- Billings, Mike Hermanson -Billings, Don Jones - Helena, Carol Lambert-Broadus, Ronald Mills - Miles City, Dennis Moore - Billings, Wayne Nankivel - Helena, Ruth Straley - Helena, Myrle Tompkins - Helena, Dick Trerise - Helena, Claudette Vance - Kalispell, Barbara Varnum - Kalispell, Jacob Wagner - Bozeman

### Council Accomplishments

- Council members successfully provided testimony at the 2005 Legislature: MVR general fund dollars remained intact, and the program received \$250,000 per year in new funding for the Extended Employment Program.
- The Council helped to oversee MVR's efforts to establish a strong workable school transitions program.
- The Council recommended that MVR staff attend cultural training: MVR staff attended the Native American Brain Injury Conference, and Joe Mathews, Administrator of the Disability Services Division, attended the National Conference of the Tribal VR Programs.
- The MVR Council Public Relations Committee has been increasing public awareness through activities such as television appearances, press releases for radio and print, and letters to the editor.

### Council Recommendations

- Support the Medicaid Infrastructure Grant, which will provide extended health care coverage to employed consumers.
- Strengthen and expand connections with the business community to improve employment opportunities for consumers.
- Hold the summer Council meeting on a reservation. Promote cultural training for the Council members.
- Establish relationships with local legislative representatives.
- Seek an interagency agreement between MVR and the Office of Public Instruction.
- Monitor consumer satisfaction by improving feedback methods.